

Wisconsin Youth Waterfowl Hunt Days 2004

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Abstract

We surveyed Wisconsin youth waterfowl hunters to determine the level of participation and estimate the harvest of ducks and geese during the 2004 Youth Waterfowl Hunt Days. We estimated less than 2,416 youth participated in the hunt statewide, harvesting a total of 8,993 ducks and 324 geese. We believe that the level of participation and harvest did not impact duck and goose hunting opportunities during the regular seasons that followed.

Introduction

Since the mid-1980's, waterfowl managers have been concerned about the decline in the number of waterfowl hunters. During the early 1990's, individual states began initiating special youth hunting days for resident game and approached the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) about the possibility of a Youth Waterfowl Hunt Day that could be held outside the normal season. In 1996, the USFWS granted states the authority to offer a youth waterfowl hunt day when duck seasons were normally closed. The basic criteria were: 1) states may select 1 day per duck hunting season, designated as "Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day," in addition to their regular duck season; 2) the day must be held outside any regular duck season on either a weekend, holiday, or other non-school day when youth hunters would have the maximum opportunity to participate; 3) the day could be held within 14 days before or after any regular duck season frameworks or within any split during a regular duck season; 4) the daily bag limit may include ducks, geese, mergansers, coots, moorhens and gallinules and would be the same as that allowed during the regular season; 5) youth hunters must be 15 years of age or younger and 6) and adult (mentor) at least 18 years of age must accompany the youth hunter. This adult could not hunt ducks, but may participate in other open seasons. In 1999, USFWS expanded the hunt to 2 consecutive days.

Wisconsin waived the general license requirements for youth hunters who participated in this hunt but required the youth to complete a certified hunter education course. In addition, the youth were required to register under Wisconsin's Harvest Information Program (HIP). A Canada goose hunting permit was required if the youth desired to hunt Canada geese. Also, each adult mentor could accompany only 2 youth hunters.

All migratory game bird hunters are required to register under HIP in each state that they hunt migratory game birds. Wisconsin entered HIP in 1998. This gave us a database from which to sample youth hunters.

In 2004, a 2-day youth hunt was held on the Saturday and Sunday (Sept 18 & 19) one week prior to the regular duck season opener in the northern duck zone and two weeks prior to the regular duck season opener in the southern duck zone. A Special Youth Waterfowl Hunt survey was conducted after the hunt. The objectives of the survey were to determine: 1) level of participation, 2) success rates and demographics of participants, and 3) comparisons between the special hunt harvest and regular season harvest.

We are unaware of a published analysis of the level of participation or estimates of harvest by youth for this special hunt, and thus report our findings for the 2004 Youth Hunt.

Methods

Surveys were mailed to 5,995 youth hunters registered with HIP, by September 30, 2004. The survey consisted of 9 questions regarding their participation in both the Special Youth Waterfowl Hunt and the regular waterfowl season.

In 1999, we found that youth who actually participated in the hunt responded to the mail survey at a higher rate than youth that didn't participate in the hunt. To account for this bias, a phone survey was conducted on a randomly selected sample of the non-respondents in 1999 and 2000. In 1999, successful phone calls were made to 74 of the non-respondents and in 2000, successful phone calls were made to 100 (3.3%) of the non-respondents.

Duck harvest estimates for the 2004 youth waterfowl survey were compared to the 2004 duck season harvest estimates derived from USFWS (Padding 2004 and USFWS Paul Padding personal communication). Youth Waterfowl Hunt Canada goose harvest estimates were compared to the 2004 Wisconsin DNR Canada goose harvest estimates (Oberc et. al. 2005).

Results

The response rate (returned either the initial or second mailing) was 43% (2,597) for the 2004 youth waterfowl survey. Approximately 89% of the responses came from males (Table 1, Question 1). Of those that responded to the questionnaire, 1,470 (56.7%) said they participated in the 2004 Special Youth Waterfowl Hunt (Table 1, Question 2).

About 56% of the mail survey respondents said they hunted both days (Sept 18 & 19) (Table 1, Question 3), while 29% hunted Saturday only and 15% hunted Sunday only. Those that responded to the mail survey reported harvesting a total of 3,655 ducks, 2.5 ducks per hunter (Table 1, Question 4). Assuming that 60% (3,597) of HIP registered youth (5,995) did hunt and that the average duck bag for both days combined was 2.5, the statewide total duck harvest for the Youth Hunt would be 8,993. This represented 2.1% of the total Wisconsin duck harvest (429,900) in 2004. Those that responded to the mail survey reported harvesting 129 Canada geese (Table 1, Question 5). Expanding this as described above, we estimate that statewide 324 Canada geese were harvested during the Youth Hunt. That represents 1.2% of the 2004 statewide Canada goose harvest of 53,887 geese (Early September and Regular season combined).

Of the youth that participated in the special hunt, a parent accompanied 73.7% of them, while a friend or neighbor accompanied 13.2% (Table 1, Question 6). Ninety-four percent (1,373) of the Special Youth Waterfowl Hunt participants said that they intended to hunt during the regular season (Table 1, Question 7).

The final 2004 participation rate was derived by a 3-step process. The results of the youth that responded to the mail survey were expanded to (43% * 5,995 youth hunters registered with HIP = 2,578) of the total potential youth hunters. The results of the phone survey were expanded to the rest of the potential youth hunters (# HIP youth hunters 5,995 – 2,578 = 3,417). We added the expanded results of the mail and phone survey together to get the final results.

For example: 2004 Youth Hunt Participants

There were 5,995 potential youth hunt participants based on 2004 HIP data. The mail survey was sent to 5,995 youth and 2,597 (43%) youth completed and returned the survey. The results from the completed surveys were then applied to 43% (2,578) of the potential youth hunters. There were 1,470 (56.7%) of the 2,597 youth that responded to the survey that said they participated in the hunt.

Of the youth interviewed during the phone surveys in 1999 and 2000, 50 of the 174 (28.7%) that were contacted said they participated in the hunt. Those results were applied to the rest of the potential youth hunters (3,326).

Corrected youth hunt participants = $((.567 \times 2,578) + (.287 \times 3,326)) / 5,995 \times 100 = 40.3\%$
(2,416) of the potential youth hunters participated in the hunt.

Of the youth that participated in the 2004 special hunt, 56.2%, 32.2%, 9.4% and 2.2% of them participated in the special hunt in 2003, 2002, 2001 and 2000, respectively (Table 1, Question 9).

We found that the youth that responded to the mail survey (successful and unsuccessful in bagging ducks) averaged 2.5 ducks for the 2-day hunt. We found from the phone survey of non-respondents (successful and unsuccessful in bagging ducks) averaged 1.43 ducks for the 2-day hunt. Our telephone survey showed that non-respondents to the mail survey averaged 36% fewer ducks for the hunt than did mail survey respondents. Thus, there was an obvious bias in our preliminary duck harvest estimate. Estimating the harvest by using the mail survey respondent information only and applying it to the entire number of active youth hunt participants resulted in an over estimation of the harvest.

For 2004, when we made adjustments for the differences in average harvests between mail survey respondents and non-respondents, we estimated that the youth harvest 8,993 ducks during this special hunt. This represents approximately 2.1% of the 2004 Wisconsin duck harvest (429,900). Likewise, mail survey respondents (successful and unsuccessful in bagging Canada geese) averaged 0.09 Canada geese for the hunt period while our phone survey showed mail survey non-respondents average 0.267 Canada geese for the 2-day hunt. We estimated the total Canada goose harvest for the 2-day hunt was 324. This represents approximately 1.2% of the 2004 Wisconsin Canada goose harvest (53,887).

The number of participants (frequency) shown by county represents the responses from the 2,597 youth that returned the questionnaire (Table 1, Question 8). We did not expand participation by county by the estimated total number of youth that participated in the hunt, as sample size for the phone survey was too small.

Discussion

In the report for the 1999 Youth Hunt, we demonstrated that there was a reporting bias between mail survey respondents and non-respondents, especially as to numbers of waterfowl harvested and degree of participation in the hunt. Past year's phone surveys showed that youth who returned the mail survey were more likely to have participated in the hunt and been successful in harvesting birds than those who did not respond.

We feel that by conducting a follow-up phone survey we are more able to accurately estimate participation and success during the Special Youth Waterfowl Hunt.

There was concern from some adult hunters that the pressure from the Youth Waterfowl Hunt was scaring the ducks and Canada geese out of the area or that the kids were taking too many ducks and Canada geese. Some adult hunters felt that this special hunt substantially reduced the population prior to the start of the regular season. Youth waterfowl survey results disprove those ideas. Historically, approximately 21% of the state's duck harvest occurs on opening day and 33% of the season harvest occurs by the end of the 2nd day of the duck season. Comparing the 2004 Youth Waterfowl Hunt to the 2004 duck season, USFWS estimated that 4,300 ducks were harvested in Wisconsin on the first day (September 27) of the 2004 duck season (hunting does not begin until noon on the 1st day of our duck season), or 1.0% of our total season harvest. USFWS also estimated that during the 1st 8 days of duck season (September 27 to October 4), a total of 136,100 ducks were harvested in Wisconsin. During the 2-day youth duck hunt, youth harvested about 41% of the number of ducks harvested on the 1st day of our duck season and about 6.6% of the ducks harvested during the first 8 days of our duck season. If the youth hunt resulted in the ducks being chased off the marshes when the regular duck season opens, one would assume that a duck harvest 10 times that in a half a day should mean that there would be no ducks left in our marshes after the opening day. If the ducks were not chased out by the regular duck season opener, we do not think the hunting pressure generated by the youth hunt chased the ducks out for the regular opener.

A few individuals have complained that kids were chasing the ducks off of their private ponds. Landowners have the option of not allowing the youth to hunt on their property. A few others felt that kids put too much pressure on public lands. We question whether a total of 2,416 youth hunting both private and public lands, statewide for two days in 2004, exerted that type of pressure.

Overall, we feel the Youth Waterfowl Hunt was a success and youth harvest is not negatively impacting the regular duck season or Canada goose harvest. Most comments received from adults and youth participating in the youth hunt were positive.

Our survey indicated that 13% of the youth hunters were able to participate because a family friend or neighbor cared enough about waterfowl hunting to mentor a youth that might not have had the opportunity to go (Table 1, Question 6). About 6% of the youth that participated in the hunt told us that they did not hunt or plan to hunt during the regular season (Table 1, Question 7).

If the hunt had any drawbacks, it was the fact that we (adult waterfowl hunters) collectively did not provide more youth with the opportunity to experience waterfowl hunting. We feel that increasing hunting opportunities to those without hunters in their immediate families is our collective challenge for the future. We encourage waterfowl hunters around the state to expose neighborhood youth to the wonders of waterfowl hunting during Youth Waterfowl Hunts.

Literature Cited

Oberc, A.A., K. Van Horn, and B. Dhuey. 2005. 2003 and 2004 Wisconsin Canada Goose Harvest Report. Wisconsin Wildlife Surveys. Vol.14, Issue 3. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. 36, 39pp.

Padding, P.I. July 2005. Preliminary Estimates of Waterfowl Harvest and Hunter Activity in the United States during the 2003 and 2004 Hunting Seasons. United States Fish and Wildlife Administrative Report. 11pp, Table 1B.

Table 1. *Survey Responses to the 2004 Youth Migratory Game Bird Questionnaire.*

Question 1. Your Gender?

Gender	Percent	Number of Responses
Female	10.5%	271
Male	89.4%	2,310

Question 2. Did you participate in the special Youth Waterfowl Hunt this year?

Answer	Percent	Number of Responses
Yes	56.7%	1,470
No	43.4%	1,125

Question 3. Please check the appropriate boxes for the days you hunted.

Day	Percent	Number of Responses
Both Days	55.8%	808
Saturday Only	29.2%	423
Sunday Only	15.0%	217

No response from 22 returns

Question 4. How many ducks did you kill during this special hunt? (Total of 1,470 responses hunted the early season; 71.0% of these killed a duck).

Duck Species	Mean	Reported Harvest
Mallard	1.89	1,098
Blue-winged Teal	2.22	975
Green-winged Teal	1.60	322
Wood Duck	1.83	1,116
Other Species	1.60	144

Other species mentioned were; Black Duck, Blue Bills, Coot, Gadwall, Hooded Merganser, Pintail, Redhead, Ring-neck, Ruddy Duck, Shoveler, Teal, and Widgeon.

Question 5. How many Canada geese did you kill during this special hunt? (Total of 1,470 responses hunted the early season; 7.8% of these killed a goose).

	Mean	Reported Harvest
Geese	1.14	129

Question 6. What relation to you was your chaperone on this special hunt?

Answer	Percent	Number of Responses
Parent	73.7%	1,091
Brother/Sister	2.0%	30
Friend/Neighbor	13.2%	195
Grandparent	3.4%	50
Other Relative	7.8%	115

Question 7. Have you or do you expect to hunt ducks or geese during the regular season this year?

Answer	Percent	Number Reported
Yes	93.9%	1,373
No	6.2%	90

Question 8. Please tell us what county you hunted in this year.

County	Frequency	Percent	County	Frequency	Percent	County	Frequency	Percent
Adams	19	1.36	Iowa	6	0.43	Polk	17	1.22
Ashland	5	0.36	Iron	3	0.21	Portage	10	0.72
Barron	16	1.15	Jackson	2	0.14	Price	9	0.64
Bayfield	9	0.64	Jefferson	35	2.51	Racine	17	1.22
Brown	27	1.93	Juneau	19	1.36	Richland	1	0.07
Buffalo	19	1.40	Kenosha	14	1.00	Rock	20	1.43
Burnett	17	1.22	Kewaunee	7	0.50	Rusk	2	0.14
Calumet	15	1.07	La Crosse	72	5.16	St. Croix	15	1.07
Chippewa	10	0.72	Lafayette	2	0.14	Sauk	10	0.72
Clark	0	0	Langlade	10	0.72	Sawyer	5	0.36
Columbia	38	2.72	Lincoln	13	0.93	Shawano	14	1.00
Crawford	27	1.93	Manitowoc	47	3.37	Sheboygan	33	2.36
Dane	30	2.15	Marathon	59	4.23	Taylor	11	0.79
Dodge	104	7.45	Marinette	16	1.15	Trempealeau	17	1.22
Door	12	0.86	Marquette	32	2.29	Vernon	10	0.72
Douglas	19	1.36	Menominee	0	0	Vilas	19	1.36
Dunn	9	0.64	Milwaukee	1	0.07	Walworth	22	1.58
Eau Claire	3	0.21	Monroe	3	0.21	Washburn	6	0.43
Florence	1	0.07	Oconto	25	1.79	Washington	21	1.50
Fond Du Lac	58	4.15	Oneida	30	2.15	Waukesha	42	3.01
Forest	7	0.50	Outagamie	35	2.51	Waupaca	34	2.44
Grant	16	1.15	Ozaukee	16	1.15	Waushara	18	1.29
Green	9	0.64	Pepin	8	0.57	Winnebago	69	4.94
Green Lake	25	1.79	Pierce	4	0.29	Wood	20	1.43

Question 9. Did you participate in this Special Youth Waterfowl hunt in past years?

Answer	Percent	Number of Responses
2000	2.2%	41
2001	9.4%	172
2002	32.2%	590
2003	56.2%	1,029

Youth Migratory Game Bird Questionnaire

Pursuant to s. 23.09(2)(k), Wis. Stats., and s. NR 10.12, Wis. Adm. Code
Form 2300-262 (R 8/04)

Dear Youth Migratory Game Bird Hunter:

I am pleased to see that you have registered for the Harvest Information Program and intend to hunt Migratory Game Birds in Wisconsin this year. Since 1996, we have offered youth waterfowl hunters a special hunt before the opening of the regular duck season. In 2001, we expanded the season to two days in hopes of providing you more opportunity to participate and learn about waterfowl hunting. This is again the case for the 2004 Youth Waterfowl season. Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions, reverse the address flap, tape the edge and return it to me. Completion of this form is voluntary.

Your participation in this survey will help us plan for similar hunts in future years and better manage our migratory game birds. If you have any specific comments or questions, please don't hesitate to add those at the end of the questionnaire.

Thanks!

Kent Van Horn
Migratory Game Bird Ecologist
Bureau of Wildlife Management

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1. Your gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male
 2. Did you participate in the special Youth Waterfowl Hunt this year?
☐ Yes (If Yes, go to question 3) ☐ No (If No, go to question 8)
 3. Please tell me what County you hunted in this year. _____
 4. Please check the appropriate boxes for the days you hunted.
☐ September 18 ☐ September 19
 5. How **many** ducks did you kill during this special hunt? (Please list your harvest by species)
Mallard _____ Blue-winged teal _____ Green-winged teal _____ Wood Duck _____
Other _____
 6. How many Canada geese did you kill during this special hunt? _____
 7. What relation to you was your chaperone for the youth hunt?
☐ Parent ☐ Brother/Sister ☐ Friend or Neighbor ☐ Grandparent ☐ Other Relative _____
 8. Have you or do you expect to hunt ducks or geese during the regular season this year?
☐ Yes ☐ No
 9. If you participated in the Special Youth Waterfowl hunt in past years, please check all the years that you hunted?
☐ 2000 ☐ 2001 ☐ 2002 ☐ 2003

If you wish to provide additional comments, please do so here.

Figure 1. 2004 Youth Migratory Game Bird Questionnaire.